

APPENDIX G

Focus Groups Summary – Local Library Trustees

Forty-eight library trustees participated in focus group sessions across the State of Tennessee. The sessions were held in conjunction with the trustee workshops, which were held in Sevierville (encompassing libraries from Watauga, Nolichucky and Clinch Powell Regions), Crossville (encompassing libraries from Fort Loudoun, Upper Cumberland, and Caney Fork Regions), Clarksville (encompassing libraries from Warioto, Highland Rim, and Blue Grass Regions), and Jackson (encompassing libraries from Forked Deer, Shiloh, and Reelfoot Regions). Interest in attending the sessions was greater than was possible, so names were drawn at random from those who said they wanted to participate. Sometimes the result was that a particular library had more than one trustee participating while interested trustees from other libraries were unrepresented. Still, the consultants believe the conversations ranged widely over concerns and issues and offered ideas and factors relevant to future library services in Tennessee.

Summary of Key Points:

- Trustees generally believe all regionals do not need to provide the same services. “The services we need vary...should have a menu available to everybody and let us choose. Core services should be available to everybody, as needed.”
- Criteria for determining regional size include drive time, population, number of libraries, and the wealth of libraries (and their area).
- Personal contact with regional staff is good. “If she weren’t there we could get into trouble.” However, some from larger libraries thought the regional director did not need to attend all the board committee meetings.
- The personal contact with regional staff also develops trust, especially in handling administrative, legal, and technology issues.
- Highest priority services from the regionals are consulting services, technology support (including e-rate applications), and training.
- “Regionals are our connection to the state and to what’s going on in Nashville. They’re a filter for us!” They also keep trustees and libraries up to date on what’s coming in the future.
- Most thought their libraries could do without regional outreach services although a few thought the distances from their libraries to Head Starts, in particular, were too great for them to take on that service.
- Some are concerned that larger geographic regions will lessen their contact with regional staffs and the expertise that’s available to them.

Notes from each of the sessions follow.

Sevierville October 18th

The twelve trustees in this session were from Jefferson, Greene, Blount, Anderson, Unicoi, Hancock, Grainger, and Anderson Counties. Several were current or past members of their regional board as well. The “newest” had been on the board for less than a year; the “senior” trustees had served for most of the last 20 years. A few had been school or public librarians earlier in their lives.

What's the primary reason for regionals?

To help small libraries because they don't have funding to do cataloging.

In small libraries the director just has to have a GED...so libraries need expertise of the people at the region. I'd hate to pay the vendor to catalog.

We have to pay for our own building repairs...can't get a raise for our library director.

In early 1990s regional did a lot of the services; we don't do that now; books come directly to us. We feel strongly about the network that gives us access to wide resources, big libraries, plus delivery.

You get books from the whole US.

We get a lot of technical support, can't always wait for guy to come any distance.

Processing can be taught fairly easily...

IF you have the people to do it.

Do you have a friends group?

No

We had high school pages do processing.

I ran the volunteer program in Indiana (Allen County).

Michigan cooperative---we got everybody together to share ideas, etc.

Our directors meet monthly and share ideas; they get to know people in other libraries.

Beyond services, sharing the cost is a savings to each library. I hope reorganization takes small libraries into account.

What are the current strengths of your regional?

We don't have to worry about cataloging; they also deliver books to us (30 miles).

I think it's helpful that the books are delivered.

Have the vendor do it and deliver it.

There's lots of cataloging information online.

To me it's that a person (the director) can bring information to libraries—what's going on in the nation.

We've heard that regional directors come to local library board meetings. How important is that?

Critical

Very high on the list

We've had the regional director go to a meeting with us on the maintenance of effort (MOE) so that town council didn't reduce the funding.

Hancock County used to get federal prisoners, but that stopped, so funding was reduced. Regional director helped us to get money back. (again based on MOE).

And they have the professionalism to handle that.

There was also an instance of taking back books because they weren't doing MOE.

What services can't leave? What can't the libraries do without?

Need regional directors and in central area so that they can get to your library

Maybe they don't need as much staff.

Our regional office is staffed minimally.

Regional is important to small rural areas.

Our director comes to every committee meeting...(seemed like she thought that was too many).

Seems to me that libraries that are doing well might be able to do without so much help. And then spread that time among the smaller, needier libraries. Provide help for those that really need it.

Libraries could make an appeal to the unemployed to help/volunteer in library.

They aren't interested!

Anderson County could do OK without having the regional director at every committee meeting. We (Watayga) haven't been processing books at the regional level for 15 years. I heard Chuck say that would have to go...I think it's nice, but we could live without it.

To what degree are regionals providing direct services to the public?

I wonder about that too. Teachers would come in for a teacher pack, but regionals don't have to be involved in that, outreach.

We haven't done that for a while either.

Our outreach is done locally; funding is our biggest problem in Greene County.

We use our van to do delivery in the 6 counties. We have a part time person who delivers to individuals. Ours like that is funded by a grant.

The state has created problems with regions, have pulled back money, reduced the role of the regional trustees, all to the detriment of the system because there hasn't been as much input.

A lot of people were upset by that, but we (regional trustees) can give the regional director a lot of support.

To what degree do regions need to be the same, how might they be different?

That's a good point...libraries need different things.

In Nolichucky the regional board has no authority to breathe since the state took over!

The region has gone downhill since the state took away authority to hire and fire regional director!

We still have a lot of input on setting priorities; board chairman sat in on the interviews for regional director.

I don't think all regions can afford to be alike. Regions here don't have same problems as in west TN.

Is drive time the right measure for determining how large a region should be geographically?

Yes

It's one criteria, but also population, number of libraries, wealth of libraries.

Three regions for the whole state is too few.

Also have to remember east TN has most population, but is hardest to get around.

Final comments? Anything else you'd like to add?

The heritage of regional systems is important; TVA had a lot to do with bookmobiles; we shouldn't ever forget history.

I was brought up in this area; I can brag about our library system. The support Watauga has offered has made service here superior.

I agree.

If you get premier players to carry the banner, lots of people will jump in. I'm impressed with the support.

It's important that even in a tiny town, I can get something in a couple of days (ILL); I hope we don't lose the advantage of technology in all this.

The library is important in a community—children come in even when parents haven't been involved: regionals have to be available to help us out.

I had heard there wouldn't be any reduction in support, but now I'm hearing something different! Also need to remember economics in the equation for regional lines.

I remember the regional brought collection of books to my grocery store.

Regional office is vital for small rural libraries; it is the informant for what's going on, help in solving your problems. Get answers for anything. Office is the heartbeat of the region. We're off the paved road in Bryceville, our needs are different, just 10 miles apart. We can redraw the map; regional office doesn't always have to stay in the same place. Put them where they're needed. I've learned a lot today about regions. Wish Tennessee would go to a statewide card.

Crossville October 19th

The twelve trustees in this session were from Monroe, Clay, Sequatchie, Cannon, Coffee, Macon, Overton, Pickett, and Rhea Counties. Several were current or past members of their regional board as well. Two had served on the state advisory council.

What's the primary reason for having regionals?

Most valuable for us is that it allows a lower level of education and experience to create a good library because we have access to more experienced and trained people. We couldn't afford a tech services or technology person, but we have access to those people.

Technology services are real critical—with all the computers in library.

We have to share a tech support guy beyond our region...takes at least a week if computer goes down.

Helps to set up computers too; we aren't computer experts locally.

They keep us updated on laws, grants. We have an advocate relationship.

They're trouble shooters for us—the fire marshal found problems, regional kept us legal...said to do this and this to comply.

It sounds as though you feel the regional staff is one of you. Is that true?

Lots of things happen/trust develops because over the years they've been there.

I don't think that's as necessary as it was 20 years ago. We've grown...I don't think they have to be at every one of our meetings. We like them, but they don't have to be there, we could call. It's great, but...

Is it necessary for all the regionals to be the same, offer the same services?

I think they need a certain core. The distances are great...they're the only access to training we have.

It could be according to the library size...smaller libraries need more than the larger ones, larger ones could afford to hire a consultant.

If library or the library director is new, they may need more start up help. But regional director wouldn't have to be present; good to have updates—could be accomplished with a faxed update sheet. It's important for libraries to have access to information. We're working on a disaster plan. Would be nice if we had access to things like that (model plans, policies), could make easier for others.

It matters where you're located and the size of the library.

Local board gets a lot out of regional director's report, but the regional director gets a lot out of the meeting too. I think the director should be there.

Personal contact is good; she monitors us...if she weren't there we could get into trouble. Libraries have life cycles; services we need vary...should have a menu available to everybody and we can choose. Core services should be available to everybody, as needed.

Our board is well meaning amateurs, so is staff in areas where there's no money. If we didn't have regional we'd be in deep trouble.

Assume there are no regionals, that you're starting from scratch. What would you create as a regional? What would be different?

There are core services we must keep: continuing education; technology support—cataloging could be done by local libraries; ILS is important.

In Coffee County we have an active literacy group. Rural libraries have just one person; there needs to be centralized book processing.

I disagree with that. We gotta cut 20% from our budget.

We get all our books from the region (have no book budget)....we don't have the money for those plastic covers.

Could you get other library in your county to do the cataloging and processing?

This is the only board I've been on that has no power at all. Local boards have power, but regional board doesn't—I just attend regional meetings for information.

Regions haven't any money; state set up the regions with state money. It started at the state, what could be done at state level to directly serve us?

There are lots of problems if you turn it over to the state.

The state is very far away.

It's not 40 years ago; we have ways to get things down to us now.

For us it's still 40 years ago; we have good-hearted amateurs running things locally.

Is it your responsibility (Himmel & Wilson) to tell the state how to cut 20%? So, why aren't we thinking about this in terms of what we do without 20%?

It comes back to the level of expertise required; we can't get volunteers to come in for some things. We have to have the technology gurus and grunts. And have to have somebody to keep us near the path...those services that don't require much expertise, those can be in the 20% cuts.

People can get into vans and come to library to get things...outreach

Outreach is lower priority (*nods*)

Make libraries better! That's what regions should do. Our sheriff checks on elderly. Our (regional) first priority should be to the libraries.

Some things like summer reading need to be coordinated at state level.

If I had to choose between processing and tech support, I'd go with the tech support (and just put the books on the shelf without processing)

Let's do our 'final say' and tell us what the highest priority service from the regional is.

Consultant services is #1

Technology support and a unified circulation system for everybody

Technology support

Information

Technology support, but training is a close second

Technology support and service; my region has been split, I don't want my ox gored; my county is 2 hours from the regional office we've been assigned to. That's too far! I'm willing to take my hit, but move Macon County to a different region rather than Clarksville. Four of the 9 counties in our region are economically depressed.

I agree with all that's been said...reorganize from the ground up. People taking books from shelves are the ones to tell you how.

Professional consulting was a life saver for us; now we've progressed and we need a lot of technology support. In a pinch a volunteer could catalog, would be detriment, but remote goes first, then cataloging goes next

We need to be sure that the state money doesn't get stuck. Get it down to the people to make better libraries.

Our staff is working more than we pay them. If we add processing and cataloging to their duties, it's immoral...or we can't get as many books because we can't handle them.

Most critical is technology support, but second and equally important for us: regionals are our connection to the state and to what's going on in Nashville. They're a filter for us!

It's just like your principal and your superintendent: I taught for 30 years. We wouldn't have books if they didn't come down from the state.

I'm with you on technology support and education/training...if we didn't have good volunteers we wouldn't be open. Except for support from region, we have \$27,000 for 4 libraries.

Remember there are different sizes of counties, libraries, and income levels.

Clarksville October 20th

The fifteen trustees in this session were from Wilson, Lincoln, Stewart, Cheatham, Humphreys, Montgomery, Williamson, Moore, Wayne, and Giles Counties. Several were current or past members of their regional board as well. Two had been trustees for less than a year.

In 2010 what's the primary reason for a regional library organization?

To keep local libraries straight and give them guidance

We're a rural county—we rely on them for support.

Technology support is crucial.

Communication for the whole region; they are prime carriers for that, also what comes down from the state

I have a greedy motive---they're a conduit for more free books. Regional people launched the READS program.

The regional director attends our meetings, brings us information we can use in the community; she's very insightful.

The training that we get...we don't have training people on staff.

Regional is a terrific resource, director attends board meetings, is a solid resource

In-service training is incredibly important.

E-rate support

The mission of a library organization we've worked with in Michigan is "we make libraries better." Is that appropriate in Tennessee?

(Nods)

It's more than that; I'm a retired school librarian; regionals really define what we ought to be; without state and regional directors we wouldn't know more than books.

Does the regional dictate what you should be?

No, there are lots of choices we wouldn't be aware of without the regionals.

They're like a mediator between us and at the state and legislature.

It's awareness. Director does attend our meetings...makes us aware of grants and things out there.

Do the regional directors act as advocates for you in Nashville?

That's true. We've known the fines and fees issue was coming, but all our libraries are different. Their money comes from different sources.

It's a way of the county getting their hands on some of library's money!

The regional directors should have interceded on that.

As a teacher, I couldn't lobby. There are only 12 regional directors, so they're not a very big voice.

As trustees we can be lobbyists, but we didn't know about the fines and fees change.

The Secretary of State is new; his predecessor had been there for years. (new guy didn't know about it) I'm disappointed that the State Librarian hasn't thought about the MOE.

Are there regional services that are becoming more important? Any becoming less important?

I quit ordering preprocessed materials and do it myself; so that service is less important now.

When we built our library, regional director was behind us all the time, stayed with us the whole time.

Professional support and her presence were/are important.

I agree cataloging and processing can be done locally. We get them faster when we do them ourselves, anyway.

Technology support has become more important.

Many of us are waiting for ILS—

Regionals are working with tiny and big libraries. I don't even think of calling of them for computers because I have IT. We don't need them for many things.

Do regional center services need to be same across the state?

Do they need to be by size and function rather than geographic?

Interesting idea!

I disagree; smaller and larger libraries can offer ideas to each other...region should include different sizes. I can learn from other libraries.

I agree with both...

Can we restructure to do both of those---some services offered on super-region basis and some on local regional level?

Smaller libraries need more technology support.

Once the broadband project comes....

Only thing the regional gives us (big library) is free books, maybe training for library staff.

Years ago, person said they didn't need the money, they could just give it to the poor counties.

There's already a tiered system...4 entities outside regional system...state just sends them the money.

Would increasing the number of tiers (and decreasing services to the larger libraries) work?

Size of regions varies already; Blue Grass has 9 counties...regional director is spread thin, attends all those board meetings.

Maybe regional director could come only quarterly (*others nodded*). She does need to be there sometimes.

Other thing she does is statistics and we need that help.

There's redundancy...if director came only quarterly, the regional board people could fill in the local boards. Most regional board members are local board members as well.

What if there were no regionals and you could start from scratch, what would the regional organization be like? What services would it provide?

Would have to be technology centered.

Would have to have in some form—technology and consultation
Have to have someone to answer questions...or do the research for us, some who knows what's going on.

Can't imagine all of us going to the state with our questions.
Even if we could, they wouldn't know beans about our library.

What about the Georgia model? In Georgia one MLS in each county is paid by the state.
Regional areas more efficient; it would take a lot of money to pay for MLS in 95 counties.
We have one MLS in our county and she spends most of her time on day to day stuff.
Many times life experience counts for more than classroom training.
Local director doesn't have to have that classroom training...but we do need that at regional level.
I have school MLS degree and I took offense at someone saying "how hard can it be to run a library?"

Final comments? Anything else you'd like to add?
Regional director organized us and went to Nashville legislative day, for whole day...there are ways to get even for budget cuts!
Regional is very important to us.
The regional director is important as a liaison; many trustees and employees wouldn't have the experience to do things without a regional director.
Regional director is huge part in rural areas...person available to answer questions.
I (big library) didn't mean to de-emphasize importance of the regional; I'm just appalled at the low level of support.
Our director retired; regional director was a tremendous help in going through interview process...we have to have that sort of help.
When you look at Tennessee geography, the only efficient way to serve statewide is in a regional structure.
We can assume there will be fewer regions and our director will have to take on more; will need more technological support so they can communicate more quickly. May have different structure...ask different levels what service they need.
Guidance from regional is important.
We need to keep them.
The value of the service they offer us hasn't changed.
I don't have to see the regional director every month, but I can call her and have access whenever I need.
We need to keep the system...question is how big, how small. We need day to day availability.
Amen the last two: necessary that we have the ability to do one on one with a real person who knows who we are and our needs. I'm amazed at how she knows each library and community.

Jackson October 21st

The nine trustees in this session were from Obion, Gibson, Haywood, Henderson, Tipton, Lauderdale, Dyer, and Hardeman Counties. Some commented that their facility was "bursting at the seams." Others had new facilities but lacked sufficient funding for operating them. A majority said their library was funded by both their city and county. While one trustee had been on the library board for over 25 years, at least two others indicated they were fairly new as trustees. One was a school librarian and another the retired director of a public library. Only one also served on the regional board.

What do you see as the primary purpose for regionals in 2010?

Support...if we couldn't call them for technology support we'd have to put the computers away.

They do a lot of good training for our staff; our director doesn't have MLS.

Grant writing, keep us abreast of new things; help us with automated circulation system

We've gone backwards, had an MLS for many years—she taught the cataloguer how to catalog. Last year our cataloger died; we have someone in her place, but we don't have MLS in charge...where does cataloguer turn?

They're going to have to teach everybody how to catalogue.

I believe every library should be unique; don't think in collection development one size fits all. Jobbers could do, but it should be done by someone who knows the community. Some things might be controversial in some communities...need someone who's knowledgeable.

What regional services are becoming more important?

They apply for e-rate for us...that's hard to do.

Locals will have to do more, but where we will fund money to do that?

It's an unfunded mandate.

We have no extra funding at all; it'll be people on the board who will volunteer. I know a little, but not enough to do library computer maintenance.

If regions get bigger, how will they get to all the area? What kind of service will we get?

Is what makes it work trust in the regional directors?

(Nods...) they're part of the family.

They're the first place to go when we need something or have a question. We don't call Nashville, we call the regional.

Does the (geographical) size of the regional allow personal relationships between regional director and libraries?

Yes

We have excellent library staff, but director's pulled in all directions; we depend on the regional person to keep us abreast of what's coming down the pike.

Regional is the administrative backup for our libraries.

Our librarian is involved in providing service and doesn't have time to do the administrative stuff.

We need to focus on the customer here! Get rid of some of the excess at the state level.

The mission of one of our former cooperative clients is "we make libraries better." Is that an appropriate mission for regionals in Tennessee?

(Nods...)

Our library wouldn't exist without the regional.

We make libraries exist!

When I was mayor, if the library needed something they had to beg, but other departments in city got anything they wanted.

We depend on regional director to be advocate at these meetings.

We were a nonprofit, had to work to get into the county budget itself.

Do you think providing direct services—deposit collections, head starts, seniors, etc. is a lower priority for regionals to do?

I think we could absorb some of that. They're close to our library.

Some local libraries do as much as they can already; our regional does senior centers
Our county has a large land area; Head Start is 15-20 miles away. Many people don't have transportation. It would take a whole morning to send somebody from the library to Head Start.
We have 2 Head Starts. It's a pretty long drive.
We have 10 incorporated cities in the county; six school systems.
Regionals have a lot of things going on at one time...multiple staff members doing multiple things at once.

Are there core services that all regionals need to offer? To what degree can there be variations?

We don't know what the other regions need. Aren't all together.
Tennessee has different cultures, east to west.
Even the 3 regions here today are different.

What does your region do really well? What is its strength?

Strength is that person we deal with on a regular basis; we have confidence in her.
Reelfoot has 2 people we depend on—the director and the assistant; we can call each of them anything.
Our regional office is in the next block...I can just walk over to ask. Would be difficult to serve a wider area.

We're not all lawyers and accountants, so we depend on region all the time to get those answers (and we aren't charged for that). They're the first line of communication.
They stay abreast of all those legalities. Our librarian was a city employee, but didn't get raises that others did. Had no idea who was her boss...

Those regional people are out here amongst us; they hear and see what's going on. If they're centralized, you don't see/hear them and they aren't seeing/hearing what's going on out here.
If libraries are responsible for own cataloging, the regional people won't be coming to the library. That will knock out some of the contact we have when they deliver things.

If you were starting from scratch to create your regional, how would it be different?

There was a time when regionals weren't state employees...if we hadn't agreed they would have been cut. At that time you had support, but not the direction we get now.
Regionals have done a good job of adapting and changing over the years. Now computers have changed what you do and they're giving tech support. They're very forward thinking.
Sometimes we get short notice on how fast we can spend money. Couple of years ago they took money to build the state library, but the state library wasn't built, but the money never came back. We had money on paper, but it wasn't released. We just get what he wants every quarter.
The closer the staff is to where the work is done, the better off we are.

Final comments? Anything else you'd like to say?

We have a sticky problem with our director. We went to regional director for guidance; they can be close mouthed and keep you out of trouble.
They're the guiding light for all of us; regional people help all of us—small and large. We take system for granted and know we can depend on it.
They provide advocacy on issues we haven't even thought about yet; very professional, great job. Essential to small libraries.
With the current economy, we need more support here rather than away at state.

How often does your board meet (*most were every month or every other month*)? I've learned a lot of questions I should be asking. I've been on board 2 years, have seen regional director only a couple of times. I've never been officially notified I'm on the board.

I'm concerned about region being enlarged and diminishing our service.

That's my concern too. We're at the northeast corner of our region...any enlargement will affect our library.

Sure don't need another level in Nashville. Need worker guys out in the field.

Speaking as former director----this is just a bad thing!